

Remarks

Claims 1, 18, 27, 29, 30 and 32 have each been amended to include the feature that "communications made using said one or more media types selected for use in the subconference are not communicated to users outside the subconference". This additional feature will be discussed further below.

The Examiner based the claim rejections on US 5,689,553 to Ahuja et al, with particular reference to the features disclosed in column 8. Ahuja briefly mentions several independent 'value added features' which can individually enhance the conferencing facilities disclosed earlier.

A sub-conferencing utility is disclosed as one of these value-added features (lines 6-12). Another such feature is a network 'blackboard' (lines 24-31). The blackboard consists of a virtual space created in the network wherein users may enter data, video or other media which can be observed by the other conferees.

The Examiner stated that this blackboard feature may be implemented in a sub-conference, thus allowing for different media types to that of the main conference to be used by the conferees. Applicant has failed to find any basis for this assertion of the Examiner. The subconference facility and the blackboard are distinct elements in a list of "value added features". There is no suggestion that they can or should be employed in combination with one another.

Accordingly, as the suggested combination is not taught in the Ahuja reference, it is respectfully submitted that claim 1 is not anticipated by Ahuja.

In anticipation that it may be alleged that the combination of the two features may be argued to have been obvious to combine together, or if it is alleged that their combination is implicit, some further distinctions over Ahuja et al will now be discussed.

In order for a blackboard feature to be implemented in a sub-conference, Ahuja would have to provide a mechanism for creating network spaces concurrently with or after a sub-conference has been created. No such mechanism is provided.

The network blackboard feature is said by Ahuja to simulate a blackboard or writing space in a face-to-face conference [col. 8, lines 29-31]. Such a blackboard is visible at all times to everyone present. Therefore the blackboard feature of Ahuja is not confined to members of a sub-conference but is rather a communal space for all conferees.

There is yet another distinction. The blackboard feature disclosed in Ahuja allows for users to select their own media type when contributing to the blackboard [Col. 8, lines 26-29]. In other words, one user might post some video footage to the blackboard space, and another might decide to paste in the text of a letter. This is in effect a freeform space in which the media choice and the contributions are not controlled.

In the system of the present invention, however, the user establishing the subconference will choose the particular media types to be used for the duration of the subconference, thereby limiting the subconference discussion to whatever media the originator of the subconference chooses.

As is now clarified in the amendments to claim 1, communications made using the selected media types are not communicated outside the conference. So apart entirely from creating a network space into which users can choose to contribute, the invention provides a subconference in which one or more media types are defined as being exclusive to the subconference.

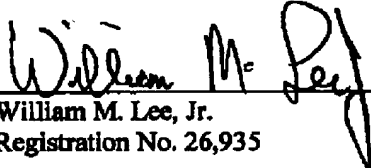
If a user joins the subconference, any and all contributions from that user in the selected media type(s) are necessarily kept within the subconference. It is submitted that this provides a further concrete technical distinction over a subconference network blackboard feature into which

users can optionally contribute in whichever media type they choose. It provides the person setting up the sub-conference with greater control over the format of the sub-conference.

Given the above, it is submitted that the application is in condition for allowance, and the Examiner's further and favorable reconsideration in that regard is urged.

Respectfully submitted,

Date: November 16, 2004



William M. Lee, Jr.
Registration No. 26,935

Barnes & Thornburg LLP
PO Box 2786
Chicago IL 60690-2786
(312) 357-1313 Telephone
(312) 759-5646 Facsimile
(312) 214-4811 Direct